



MOLLY KEMP

Interviewer: Regina Kong

Others Present: N/A

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Interview Location: Hobbit Hole, Inian Islands

Transcriber: Regina Kong

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“You have to learn to love things...before you care enough to make a difference”

-born Michigan, Upper Peninsula

-“I was always drawn to Alaska and here I am” [0:47]

-father taught geology, loved outdoors even though physical limitations. dream was always to have homestead

-precocious kid. thought the world was on a path. “wanted a wilderness, self-sufficient life at least as a base of safety and home.” [2:19]

-thinks we’ve lost sense of wilderness in the world

-fell crazy in love with a young man and his family who’d homesteaded after WW1

-read Population Bomb in high school. made her think too many people. wanted to live a life that wasn’t harming anyone

-Tenakee Springs with dream of self-sufficiency, on old mink farm

-Molly’s friend died in a kayaking accident about a year or two into Tenakee (would be interesting to follow up)

-left Michigan 17, came to Tenakee 19 “I had significant opportunities that I passed up because I wanted this life more than anything else at the time” [5:39]

-started fishing with wonderful old man, Don McGee in Tenakee that Molly still misses daily

-not common to have women on fishing boats

-6:49 started looking for job as deck hand on troller. “I heard about the Hobbit Hole and that there’re these two brothers out here. I heard that one of them needed a deck hand but they didn’t want to hire women. I can’t believe I did this, but I wrote this really snarky letter to people I’d never met. ‘Well I heard you don’t hire women. Well let me tell you what you’re missing.’ ...Fred wrote back to me saying ‘I don’t know where you got that idea but if you want to fish kings with me you can do that.’”

-talked about worries about “big crunch” coming

-8:33 “I got out here [to the Hobbit Hole] by catching a ride from Tenakee on a friend’s fishing boat. And I fell asleep and I remember waking up just coming through the pass here. It was like ‘This is the center of the universe.’ It’s just such a fantastic place. I was completely smitten from the moment I set foot here.”

-9:36 “All the water of Southeast Alaska comes charging out. There’s so much life. There’s fish everywhere. It’s just...It is.... And the coziness of the cove, of the actual Hobbit Hole cove and the ability to walk out and see the ocean out there”

-10:02 “The atmosphere of the time then was pretty uniquely wonderful. Very welcoming, kindly, accepting. Crazy stuff going on but a lot of hard work”

-communal dinner every night. willingness to jump in and do whatever needed to be done

-being out on the ocean with the swell

-Fred and Greg were unique characters “funny in different ways but at heart both incredibly kind and perceptive people” [11:02]

-felt immediate kinship with Fred, very comfortable, instantly it’s all okay

-at that point, had already latched onto Nick (12:00 follow-up on “series of calamities” involving Nick up in Kalamakee)

-12:17 “If I had not already made this commitment to Tenakee and that piece of ground where I was gonna stick and had this anticipated romance in my life and all those things, those guys would’ve never have pried me out of here. I would’ve been the cook, dishwasher, deckhand forever. Because this was such a cool place”

-Fred, endless list of mostly women who were his deckhand

-Fred got up at daybreak, 2/3am. Molly would cook. Day consisted of driving around in the boat and working the gear from the pit.

-[14:20] running trolling wire, clobbering fish...etc.

-15:00 “You mess it up you have to deal with it,” was what Fred would tell Molly

-15:58 Great story about Fred up in Glacier Bay. Molly was cooking breakfast, towing Greg’s boat. Was asked to drive Fred’s boat. 17:39 “So I just came up from below and took the wheel. He [Fred] went below. Within twenty seconds there’s this terrible noise. I look around and we’re on a rock. I mean this is the worst of all possible things to happen. We had actually plowed right onto a rock. The other boat is coming up behind us and it doesn’t have power and it’s just being towed by us. I was just dumbfounded. Fred came flying up and we started doing what we could think of...18:43 “You think a person might get a little upset at that point and Fred says to me, ‘Stop. I want you to remember that no matter what happens, this wasn’t your fault.’”

-[20:30] on the radio, someone says “I can’t believe I forgot about that rock. Oh well. Straight forward fuck-up”

-[20:45] “That’s a new and novel approach to mistakes. You make them and then you go on”

-asked if met people like Fred, replied that there’s a “good culture, micro culture”

-met Don McGee after accident where she lost her partner. McGee and wife kind of took her in

-[21:53] “And again, I think it has something to do with fishing. If you react to an emergency any other way, it doesn’t help. It doesn’t add to the situation to get upset and angry and act out the emotions that are very normal. But if you can kind of keep your calm and equilibrium and sense of humor, it helps a lot.”

-came back to work with Fred briefly when started working with Dept of Fish and Game, research end. got out and fished with people she knew.

-[24:26] Molly was out on sea lion research boat. Talking with Fred that they had to give up the place. Thought about alternatives to another commercial fishing lodge. “It came across my mind—wouldn’t this be a wonderful place to have a field station?” [25:12] “It was a great idea but who was going to make that happen? We were all tired”

*get to how exactly the school came about

-[26:30] Zach wrote to Molly out of the blue, asked her to be on the board of directors

-[27:18] “It’s just be incredible what he’s accomplished” (of Zach)

-Molly is treasurer

-[27:48] agonizing for the Howes to sell the place

-[28:23] initially Molly had idea that HH was place for young people to stay

-[28:46] “I don’t think leaving was the part they [the Howes] wanted. It’s the part of being situated someplace safe and stable. Age is a real thing and the workload out here is tremendous. There’s a time when we have to face up to that, hard as it is”

-[29:49] “A place that you love so much like this... You just have to try to walk away than be only part of it... I think I understand that better than I would’ve when we were first talking about it.”
Greg and Jane want to enjoy new life and not look back.

-[30:38] “I sometimes think I care more about places than people, which is a really terrible admission” For Molly it’s Tenakee “You just kind of become part of a place” 31:13

-[31:51] model used around Alaska= get young people to live next to you to help maintain

-[32:13] “44 years” in Alaska

-[32:31] have you found what you wanted to find when you were 19? “It certainly didn’t play out the way I expected when we started. I think I feel mostly a sense that I could’ve done more.”

-[33:26] “On a selfish basis there’s no more wonderful place in the world left... This is like the planet used to be before it was overrun with humanity. There’s so much life and abundance here. It’s incomparable”

-[33:50] any changes Molly’s noticed. involved with pulp mill battles in 1980s 35:47 “There’s nothing that equals in my mind an entire valley that you’ve never even had a chance to hike in suddenly stripped bare... Recognizing at the same time that we’re all consumers and trying to balance that... It’s a constant juggling, balancing act”

-[37:00] what are certain trade-offs? “Part of my thing that I’ve really come to grips with lately is that it’s okay not to travel. I don’t have a big urge to travel... What I feel good about is that we’re trying to get our food production to be as completely self-sufficient as we can. Growing things year round is a big goal. I really like harvesting food and processing it. Don’t like cooking but processing it. I love the feeling of a table covered with canning jars all sealed”

-[38:35] favorite foods that come from the land “My favorites are fish-based or venison. Vegetables from the garden. It’s hard to get away from carbohydrates except sweet potatoes... The dairy things are awfully hard for me to let go” trying to do more with seaweed

-[39:51] “It’s hard. I was struck by that when I was going through that fishing gear again.” 40:17 “people used to take those spoons and fix them up because it was so hard to get things here. And now that it’s so much easier that’s part of why we throw things away so much”

-[40:48] “the dollar value is going up. things are getting so expensive that people are trying to rehabilitate stuff because it’s cheaper. and now they’re finding that these materials were built to last a long time.” “I hope for all you guys sake that it’s not too late to turn it all around”

-[41:30] “when I first went to Tenakee. There was such a different feeling. If you get a reward for being ingenious and using what’s at hand. The reward is you make your chainsaw work or you can fix things, there’s a real satisfaction in that. That is now eh Amazon will get it here in three days. It really whittles away at your feeling that this is a worthwhile life to live. I think that’s where. And you can just put enough money towards something and you can have anything delivered to your door or have your door built for you and your house built for you... And it’s really unsettling in a lot of ways. It’s hard to express... Actual knowledge isn’t as valuable anymore because you can always ask Google. Who needs to memorize a list of species? We have to rethink what’s valuable. But as I always point out, if you drop your smartphone in the saltwater it always helps to know when the tide is coming in or out”

-[44:32] what does molly think about kids “I think it’s so wonderful to see people coming back here. Because they got it. And it’s great. That was the hope and it’s happening. I think sometimes it’s really humorous when you see people’s astonishment and trying to grapple with things. I think how I respond to the urban environment in exactly the same way. But I think that the awakening of the natural world as I’ve had the privilege of experiencing it—wildlife encounters and being in places that’ve had very little human impact—that’s really wonderful. I think one of the girls in that first Nueva school video. It actually made me cry. She said coming here was the first time she had experienced nature without guilt... Here there’s still so much life overflowing from every container.

It's really inspiring. It makes you want to protect it and also to feel....How to separate personal sense of guilt from reality that there are too many people. I think it makes kids shun nature if all you hear is gloom and doom. You can't care about what you don't love. You have to learn to love things...before you can care enough to make a difference [47:01] The kids who grow up in Tenakee are free to just be outside all the time doing whatever they want. They're incredibly knowledgeable. Who knows what they'll do about it but they really care about it. [48:05] "You can't expect people to care about the future of these animals and ecosystems unless they have an emotional attachment to them, which is what I hope they get here"